RADIO STAR

KING EDWARD SCHOOL IMPLEMENTS A CAMPUS-WIDE WIRELESS NETWORK

FOUR YEARS AGO, KING EDWARD VII SCHOOL IN MELTON MOWBRAY, UK, RECOGNISED THAT THE IMPACT OF THE WEB ON EDUCATION WOULD BE SEISMIC AND THAT ICT WOULD PLAY AN INCREASINGLY IMPORTANT ROLE.

While the benefits of adopting technology are obvious, the school recognised that the project was also going to be a big challenge.

To deliver the benefits meant overcoming physical and technological obstacles such as dragging classes from classrooms to computer rooms which was recognised as hugely disruptive, and on a campus the size of King Edward VII, not practical. And cabling the entire school would have caused even greater disruption.

Since King Edward VII's successful application for Technology College status, the challenge has been to deliver total IT access to everyone in the school. In 2001 a major step to meeting that challenge was taken: a mobile solution with total access to Intranet, Internet, file and print servers.

THE CHALLENGE

IN 1998, THE SCHOOL INVESTED IN A BROADBAND LEASED LINE, WHICH LED TO A PILOT SCHEME THAT EQUIPPED FIVE STAFF AND 18 STUDENTS WITH LAPTOP COMPUTERS ACCESSING A FIXED NETWORK BASED INTRANET.

Within one year this number was expanded to 40 students and further rapid expansion meant the school's Intranet was not being exploited to the full because of the limitations of the fixed network.

In September 2000, in partnership with the E-Learning foundation, a charity set up to supply technology to King Edward VII and surrounding schools, the school provided a further 100 Laptops PCs to staff and students.

It became increasingly obvious the existing hard-wired intranet was not going to cope with the increased demand. However because of the eclectic nature of the buildings on the school campus, and the prohibitive costs associated with cabling, it soon became apparent that an innovative solution was the only way forward.

Leader of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Development Paul Hynes explains: "We did several evaluations but the only wireless networking infrastructure that was robust enough to satisfy our needs was Cisco's Aironet 340 series. We saw it as a medium to create 'anytime, anywhere learning' with students able to access worksheets and Internet links from home, in the evening and at weekends."

THE SOLUTION

AS THE ONLY SECONDARY SCHOOL SERVING THE AREA IT WAS RARELY SHORT OF INTAKE, BUT IT IS NOW HEAVILY SUBSCRIBED ESPECIALLY AT SIXTH FORM LEVEL, WHICH HAD AN INTAKE OF 300 STUDENTS THIS TERM. AS A SCHOOL, IT IS IN THE STUDENTS IT PRODUCES AND IN THE FEEDBACK, ENTHUSIASM FOR AND POPULARITY OF THE SYSTEM AMONG THE STUDENTS THAT THE REWARDS OF THE AIRONET SOLUTION ARE BEST MEASURED.

Among the main benefits to the school administrators and teachers are electronic registration, easy access to statistics such as pupil lateness, easier access to existing resources and greater communication between teachers.

In school time, the Aironet solution means that where students bring up subjects, or have questions, the answers can be sought on the web and informed discussion can be accommodated easily. Out of school, students have access to a vast repository of information and communications access to the school.

While it is too early to measure results statistically in terms of higher pass rates, students will leave the school with the skill set and confidence bred of familiarisation with new technology. They now use IT to approach many different problems.

The students also have an understanding of wireless connectivity, and for example can use and configure video conferencing equipment. They will leave with an understanding of the benefits of IT and are far better qualified to enter IT supported environments whether in higher education or in business.

"WE HAVE PURCHASED A ROVING PC ROOM FOR MOST FACULTIES. THE SYSTEM IS VERY LOW MAINTENANCE, COVERAGE IS FINE, AND THE TECHNICIANS LEARNED A LOT FROM THE INSTALLATION"
PAUL HYNES, LEADER OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY (ICT) DEVELOPMENT

THE FUTURE

THE SCHOOL IS RECOGNISED AS A CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE AND HAS BECOME SOMETHING OF A REFERENCE SITE FOR STAFF FROM OTHER EDUCATIONAL ESTABLISHMENTS SEEKING TO INVEST IN WIRELESS TECHNOLOGY AND WHO ARE EAGER TO LEARN OF ITS EXPERIENCES.

Walsh is currently working on a report the National College for School Leadership on how schools nationally are adapting their teaching and learning by making best use of information communication technology.

Paul Hynes comments: "We have this vision of an entire electronic learning hub with remote access. We are not quite there yet, but we look forward to developing our relationship with Cisco to support and assist us.

Further development of web based resources, greater use of databases to reduce teachers' bureaucratic burden and the development of resources for different ability levels are our goals."

"THE MOST INTERESTING DEVELOPMENT HAS BEEN THE INSTALLATION OF A WIRELESS NETWORK THROUGHOUT THE SCHOOL SITE. THIS KEEPS KING EDWARD VII AT THE FOREFRONT IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF ICT FOR LEARNING."
KEN WALSH, HEAD TEACHER KING EDWARD VII

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